

3rd Sunday after the Epiphany

January 26, 2003

Jon. 3:1-5,10; 1 Cor. 7:29-31; Mk. 1:14-20

Introduction. Have you been to the movies recently? I swear that the trailers—what we used to call “coming attractions”—are becoming works of art in themselves. They are carefully designed to create a powerful impression in just a minute or two; and they often are so entertaining that many DVD releases of movies include the trailers as an extra feature on the disk.

Expertly crafted as they are, however, these trailers still are no substitute for the film itself. Their whole purpose, after all, is to lure you back to the theatre when the new feature is released.

On the 2nd Sunday in Advent, and two weeks ago, on the 1st Sunday after the Epiphany, we heard trailers for the Gospel of Mark. The first was a brief description of John the Baptist, with his call for repentance, and his promise of the one who was to come.

The second was Jesus’ baptism by John in the Jordan River, with the descent of the Holy Spirit and the voice of God claiming Jesus as his Son.

In today’s gospel reading, the trailer has disappeared from the scene and the real thing is here. Jesus himself takes center stage, and his ministry begins. *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”* (Mark 1:14-15)

The long-awaited feature film has begun.

1. Science fiction occasionally uses the notion of a tear in the space-time continuum, to develop the plot for a story. In a sense, this is what Jesus is talking about as he begins his proclamation. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near...”

The concept of time is critical to understanding the bible. Unlike some eastern religious traditions, for whom time is unimportant to salvation, the Judaeo-Christian tradition is **based** on the movement of history through time.

There is the pre-history, found in Gen. 1-11, which includes old traditions about creation, the great flood, and the tower of Babel. There is the call of Abraham and the covenant with him which creates a people for God. There is the Exodus and the covenant of Law that separates God’s people from all others. There is the kingdom of Israel and the covenant with David that establishes that kingdom forever. And there is the exile, and the hope of a Messiah who will fulfill all those promises from the past.

Israel came to believe that this **final** promise would happen at the **end** of time. Jesus comes and proclaims that a decisive rupture or tear in the flow of human history has already begun, and that he himself stands at the center of that rupture.

This is no ordinary moment in time. This is the very moment toward which a divinely ordered human history has been rushing for all those centuries upon centuries. This is the time that the visionaries and prophets as well as the whole people Israel, have so long awaited.

This view is reflected in St. Paul's thoughts in our second reading. "Brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short;... for the present form of this world is passing away." (1 Cor. 7:29,31) The distinction in our calendars between B.C. and A.D. only hints at the rupture in history which begins in Jesus Christ.

2. Occasionally events occur in our lives that make everything else seem trivial—at least for a while. Some of these are negative, such as the death of a loved one, a devastating illness, or the sudden loss of a job. Other are positive—a new career, a marriage, welcoming a baby into the family.

When you consider how **these** kinds of experiences can overwhelm our minds and hearts, you begin to appreciate what **Jesus** is saying in today's reading. His coming, the breaking in of God's kingdom, of God's future, his coming... is earthshaking; and it requires a response. "Repent, and believe in the goods news."

Writing in this vein, St. Paul urges some rather dramatic changes upon the church at Corinth. He tells them to "get over it"; to get beyond their present arrangements and attachments, to live as if they had no possessions.

This is not easy for us who are **fixated** on things, and power, and prestige. Madonna had it right in her songs from some years ago: "I'm just a material girl"...and aren't we all?

But in Jesus the old world is losing its grip on us; a new world is being born. And Jesus invites us to repent...to get in step with the way things are, now that Christ has entered our world, now that the future of God has broken in.

The story is told of a mother calling to her son. "Johnny, tell your sister to come in the house out of the rain." "I can't mom," came the reply. "And just why can't you?" demanded his mother. "Because... Mom... we're playing Noah's Ark, and she's one of the sinners."

It's all too easy to fall into the trap of thinking that repentance... is for those **sinners** outside the ark. But the difference between us and them is not that we are **better** people; truth is... sometimes we are worse.

No, the difference is that **we** know something that they do **not**. We know that the world with all of its preoccupations and attachments is passing away. We know that something—someone—new—has come; and that because of him, we can **change**.

3. Jesus' invitation to repent and believe is exemplified by today's gospel story of his calling the first disciples. Following Jesus means that we are always in the process of leaving something behind, in order to move toward new life in Christ.

These disciples leave behind their family and friends, their livelihood and homes; they forsake everything... to follow Jesus. Yet Jesus does not cajole or coerce them. There's not even a record in the gospels of any debate or discussion among them. They simply drop everything and follow Jesus.

God calls **each** of us to follow Jesus in the same way. Sometimes "leaving behind" is figurative; it means staying put and discovering opportunities to "fish" where we are. But sometimes it means actually leaving an old life behind and starting something new, like Simon, Andrew, James, and John.

Whatever our call, though, the **ability** to change our mind, to change our behavior, to follow Christ, is a gift from God that comes through faith.

Conclusion. As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother casting a net into the sea. He approached them and **personally** invited them to be a part of God's future. He went a little further and he saw two more brothers: James and John. He went up to **them** extending the same invitation; and they, too, followed.

Jesus still comes, personally, to us with his proclamation and invitation. He comes in word; in bread and wine. He proclaims that the future of God... is now. And he invites us to leave behind the ways of the world, and follow him.

As you leave here and return to the ministry of your daily life, God grant you the faith to abandon your nets, get out of the boat, and become part of a new world, the open future of God, that is ours.